

THE KERASHER PAPYRUS

BY EDWARD ULBACK

AMONGST the treasures of the British Museum is a hieratic manuscript, found in Thebes, written by, or for, an ancient Egyptian nobleman of the name of Kerasher. It is a religious work of the Ptolemaic or Roman period, in good legible condition, and is very valuable as showing the state of opinion on the question of the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body, as prevalent in Egypt a short time previous to the advent of our Lord. It is thus of great service in our study of the history of religious thought.

The illustrations given are of funeral rites, and these, it is plainly indicated, were very similar to those which had been practised in Egypt for one or two thousand years previously. And the text shows that the ideas of the future state had not greatly changed amongst the Egyptians since the times of the patriarchs. There was still that firm faith in the blessed immortality of the purified which is found in the very earliest records of the human race.

In this short treatise mention is made of the *Ka*, which was the substantia of which body, *Kat*, and soul, *Ba*, and glorified body, *Sah*, and glorified soul, *Khu*, were developments. Every existing thing had a *Ka*. Then there was the mortal body, which, ere there can be blessedness after death, must be purified within and without. Thus, Kerasher is addressed: "Not a member of thee is imperfect," "It enters the underworld perfectly cleansed." This probably refers to the work of the embalmer. The glorified body was not the transmutation of the mummy, as some have imagined. That was but the seed, which should germinate, and from which the body of the future was to grow. "Ptah," the great former, will be at hand "to mould thy members. Amen is near thee to renew life. A fair path is opened before thee. Thou wilt see with thine eyes, hear with thine ears, and speak with thy mouth. The soul will be renewed godlike, in the underworld will be made thy transformations according to thy wish. Thy members will be on thy bones like what thou hadst on earth. Thou wilt drink with thy throat, eat with thy mouth, and receive nourishment with divine souls." All is to be

similar to the old body, but formed afresh, and that in accord with the desires of the soul. This is the Pauline idea. "Thou sowest not that body which shall be. To every seed its own body."

Man has a spiritual as well as a corporeal nature. This was not overlooked in the subtle psychology of the ancient Egyptians. The soul lives on. Kerasher is addressed: "Enter thou into the horizon with Ra. Thy soul will be received into the Neshem bark of Osiris. They will make thy soul godlike in the abode of Sebat. They will make thee to triumph for ever and ever." "Thy soul liveth in heaven every day." "Thy soul shall live, thy body shall grow, by the command of Ra himself. There shall not be decay or injury to thee. Thou wilt be like Ra for ever and ever."

Whatever else is needed, the importance of purification is strongly enforced. Apparently this comes on a principle of grace. The manuscript, giving no reasons, opens: "Thou art pure. Thy heart is pure. Thou art pure behind, pure before, pure within. Thou art washed with water and incense. Not a part of thee hath a blemish. Kerasher is purified in the pool of the field of peace, north of the field of adoration [or perhaps grasshoppers]. Enter into the hall of truth. Thou art cleansed from sin and all ill. Thy name is 'Stone of Truth.' Hail, Kerasher! Enter Hades as one greatly cleansed." There may be a suggestion here of the purifying work of the embalmer on the body; but certainly the promises have a much wider scope.

The negative confession, as it is called, in which in former days the deceased invoked forty-two gods and declared to each his freedom from sin, is here reduced to six assertions. Kerasher calls certain mysterious gods to witness that he had not (1) done violence, (2) nor made boasting, (3) nor carried away the property of the dead, (4) nor done injury, (5) nor been wrong at heart, (6) nor made rebellion. Then follows the grand old profession of the Egyptian, which we have in the Book of Job. "He hath given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked. There is no accusation against him before the gods." "Let him be favored amongst those who are favored." "Grant that his soul may travel to every place where he would be, living in the land forever (twice over) and for eternity (twice over)."

There is a hieroglyphic inscription on the vignette which is of similar import. One passage calls for notice—"Thou art favored

before the gods," and again, "He places thee at the head of the favored ones." These are very like expressions of faith in salvation by Divine grace.

Thus much is clear, that in Egypt, in the pre-Christian era, there was a firm belief in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, but only those who are purified are thus blessed. And that purification is wrought by the favor of divine beings. These views prevailed, with but little change, for hundreds and even thousands of years. This, be it noted, gives but scanty help to the doctrine of evolution in religion. It suggests that, side by side with all the grotesque and evil mythology of ancient times there were ideas of God and the human soul, probably traditions from an earlier revelation, which found an abiding place in men's hearts and creeds. They are truths which never had been and never can be eradicated from human consciousness. The universal effort has not been so much to establish as to destroy this faith. In spite of all questioning and fears, it has blazed forth in every generation. Wherever civilization has left its records, prominent amongst them has been found the evidence of the recognition of this truth. Earth's oldest monuments are temples and tombs, both of which utter strongly expectation of a life to come. Earth's oldest literature is called "The Book of the Dead." This title was given before its contents were known. The true title should have been that found in its pages, "The Book of Going Out by Day," or the book of resurrection into life on the morning after the night of death. It is assuredly a momentous fact, not sufficiently considered by students of the evolution hypothesis in relation to religion, that the very earliest records of the human race show a belief, not only in the future resurrection of both body and soul, but also in the need of purification to make the future state happy and blessed.